Trip Report
U.S. Department of Energy and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
April 11, 2007
Reno, NV

Prepared by Kurt Rautenstrauch April 12, 2007

Attended by: Mark Vandeberg (DOE), Kurt Rautenstrauch (BSC), Laurie Sada (FWS, Assistant Field Supervisor), Selena Werdon (FWS Deputy Asst. Field Supervisor), Marcy Haworth (FWS), Kevin Kritz (FWS), and Laurie Everill-Murray (FWS)

The purpose of this meeting was to (1) discuss the timing of consultation and the possibility of consulting on both rail corridors before DOE makes a corridor selection, and (2) discuss potential impacts to Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT) and bald eagles from construction of a bridge over the Walker River. In addition, important information was obtained on the presence of Ute lady's-tresses (ULT), a threatened plant species that was recently re-discovered at Panaca Springs, near the Caliente corridor.

Timing of Consultation–Mark provided a project overview using the handouts prepared for a meeting with the FWS on December 13, 2006. He presented DOE's need to obtain a biological opinion by about August 2008 to support development of a Right-of-Way grant by the BLM. Laurie Sada stated that it may be possible to consult on both corridors at the same time, and include the results of informal and formal consultation for both corridors in the same opinion. She also said that the Las Vegas FWS office likely would be the lead for the consultation. A final decision on whether the consultation on both corridors could be combined will depend in part on conclusions of impacts to species around Caliente and Schurz.

We discussed the need to involve the Walker River Paiute Indian Tribe (Tribe) in the consultation process. It was agreed that DOE would take the lead on contacting the tribe about the endangered species consultations.

Impacts to LCT–Mark and Kurt explained the current conceptual design and proposed construction methods for the bridge and presented a diagram of the bridge design and a map of the location. The following was discussed.

- In their biological assessment, DOE likely will have to assume that the fish passage being constructed at Weber Dam will be completed and that there is a likelihood that trout will be present at the bridge crossing at least during spawning.
- Construction of the bridge should occur after spawning, which occurs from about February to April, but may extend to early July depending on the temperature of the water.
- The FWS staff agreed that the bridge as designed, with 40-foot spans and one or more set of piers in the water, would not have long-term impacts on the movements of LCT. After reviewing an aerial photo showing numerous historic

channels in the area, they agreed that a longer span or trestle over the existing channel (i.e., no piers in the existing channel) would not be useful.

- It is possible that some fish could be present in the area year-round if there are deep enough pools in the area to maintain low temperatures. Selena Werdon encouraged DOE to obtain existing data on water temperatures in the area or put temperature gauges in the Walker River at and near the crossing. She suggested using small gauges such as those made by Onset (http://www.onsetcomp.com/), putting them on or close to the bottom of the drainage in the deepest water, and attaching them to an existing structure or rebar.
- The FWS will ask their other fisheries biologists whether they have any additional information on conditions in this part of the river or the likelihood of LCT being present there in the future.
- FWS staff stated that DOE should include as much detail as possible in the biological assessment about the design and construction methods, including timing of construction, methods for controlling erosion, and maintaining water flow.
- Selena Werdon also suggested that DOE include in the assessment justification for not further analyzing impacts of an accident at the crossing location. Kurt stated that this justification was included in a previous biological assessment to support a conclusion of no impacts from national transportation, and that it could be summarized in the assessment for rail construction.

Impacts to Bald Eagles–It was agreed that there would be few or no impacts to bald eagles because there are no large trees in the area that would be used for roosting and a small portion of the river would be temporarily disturbed. FWS staff did not agree among themselves about whether there would be "no effect" or "not likely to adversely affect." DOE will have to develop that conclusion in the biological assessment and have it reviewed by FWS. It is also possible that bald eagles will be de-listed before completing of the consultation.

Impacts to Ute Lady's-Tresses–Kurt asked why the FWS had added this plant species to the March 2007 species list (it was not on the February 2005 list). Kevin Kritz stated that the species (an orchid found in moist soils primarily at 4,000 to 7,000 foot elevation in Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming) has been re-discovered at Panaca Springs in 2005, which is the first time it has been found in Nevada in about 70 years. A FWS botanist (Laurie Everill-Murray) who observed this species at Panaca Springs joined the meeting. She said that the plant may also be found in wet soils elsewhere in Meadow Valley. She will send to Kurt a report summarizing the sighting of the plant, a FWS status review, and photographs. Panaca Spring is located on private property less than 1 km north of Panaca and about 7 km from the intersection of the Caliente and Eccles alternative alignments.

Laurie Sada suggested that DOE contact Lucy Jordan, the FWS lead for this species (located in the Utah West Valley City office, 801-975-3330) to determine if there is any additional information available that would be useful for evaluating impacts.

The possibility of conducting surveys for this species was discussed. Surveys should be conducted in July, when the plant is in flower. Mark and Kurt stated that all likely habitat is private property and that it would be unlikely that DOE could get permission to conduct surveys.

The implications of this plant possibly being present along the Caliente alternative alignment were not discussed in detail.